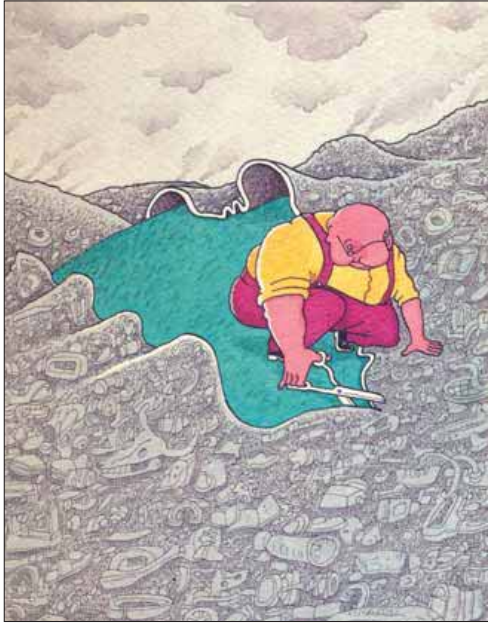




currents

news ↻ commentary ↻ briefs



Green Power Challenge

EPA names Bellingham a leader in renewable energy purchases

“Our lifestyles have very serious consequences on the natural world. Every time we turn on the lights, or turn on the gas or drive, there’s a consequence.”

—Andrew Connor

BY IAN CHANT AND JOHN C. DAVIES

BELLINGHAM IS the sort of place you’d expect to be leading the way in alternative energy solutions. It’s a forward-thinking, environmentally conscious burg where gas costs an arm and a leg and resentment over a war seen as concerned mostly with oil prices continues to simmer. It is, in that delightfully arrogant and only slightly pretentious way, a city where we’re mostly convinced that we can do things better. And in the arena of supporting clean alternative energy sources, we’ve proven it.

On Saturday, Bellingham will be recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency as one of the nation’s few Green Power Communities, thanks to the efforts of local leaders, volunteer door knockers and community members. This milestone marks the success of what organizer Cathy Lehman calls “a six-month campaign to try and increase the green power energy consumption in Bellingham to 2 percent of our overall energy usage.”

“People in this community care about environmental values and respond when we offer them solutions,” said Alex Ramel of Bellingham Public Works. “People are well aware that global warming is a problem. What they are not aware of is how doable solutions are.”

To get residents and businesses using cleaner, al-

ternative fuel sources that cost more than traditional fuel supplies, Lehman’s organization, Sustainable Connections, a nonprofit network of sustainability minded business owners and community leaders, partnered with the City of Bellingham and Puget Sound Energy to encourage Bellingham citizens from all walks of life to go green in their energy consumption by signing up for green power through PSE.

Volunteers spent months signing up business owners and residents for PSE’s Green Power Program.

The City of Bellingham, Western Washington University, and Whatcom County now offset 100 percent of their energy use with purchases of renewable energy. In addition, 106 Bellingham businesses and 1,975 residents participate in the program, Ramel said.

One of the top 10 programs of its kind in the nation, PSE’s Green Power Program charges users nominally more money per kilowatt hour of electricity, which reflects the additional cost of clean generated energy.

Customers purchase kilowatt-hours of electricity that go into the regional electricity grid. By participating, customers can increase demand for, and lower the cost of, renewable energy. The money is then re-invested by PSE to purchase more of the energy from solar, wind or biomass sources.

currents::

Rather than directly purchasing green energy for your home or business through the program, signing up for energy guarantees a further investment by PSE in green power sources for their grid.

Green power includes energy generated from renewable, non-polluting sources such as wind, solar or geothermal energy. These differ from nonrenewable resources such as coal, oil and natural gases, which are finite and environmentally damaging to extract.

"When you buy green power," Lehman explains, "you don't actually have the energy generated at the methane digester go into the line and into your house. What you're doing is you're providing demand for that kind of energy."

In other words, when you start getting green energy in your own home, it doesn't mean that your home will suddenly be powered by a far-off windmill, but that PSE will have to spend the extra money you're paying to provide more energy from windmills to all of its customers.

Some alternative power PSE uses throughout the region is generated locally, though, at the VanderHaak Dairy Anaerobic digester in Lynden, which converts cattle manure into methane, which, in turn, powers a biogas engine producing enough energy to serve nearly 180 homes.

One of the main goals of the campaign, which began last September, was to demystify alternative energy sources and let people know just how easy and accessible it is to be a part of the solution to a growing problem, or in Lehman's words,

"to make green energy seem like a normal thing, like everybody's doing it." Organizers adopted a two-pronged approach, with Sustainable Connections taking point on converting business and community leaders helping to bring residential energy customers into the eco-friendly fold.

The outreach effort included a competition between neighborhoods. The top three neighborhoods with the highest percentage of green power participants will receive \$1,000 dollars toward neighborhood improvement projects. The results will be announced by Bellingham Mayor Tim Douglas at the April 21 event.

"The money is supposed to go toward projects in the neighborhood that contribute to climate solutions," Lehman said, "but the neighborhoods can decide what they want to do that achieves that."

Andrew Connor helped lead the charge in Sunnyland neighborhood, where he lives.



Connor made announcements at neighborhood meetings and distributed fliers to area residents. Connor said purchases of green power were important in themselves because they constitute a reduction in greenhouse gases, but he said raising awareness among residents about renewable energy is even more important.

"Our lifestyles have very serious consequences on the natural world," Connor said. "So getting it in people's heads that every time we turn on the lights, or turn on the gas or drive, there's a consequence to the natural world, people will make a lot more decisions about how they use resources and inevitably lead lives that have less of an impact."

For its efforts, the City receives an EPA-funded set of photovoltaic converters that will be installed on the roof of the Environmental Learning Center at Maritime Heritage Park. The solar cells will help demonstrate the community's commitment to finding new solutions to the power dilemmas of the future. ☺

EPA representatives will present civic leaders with a plaque and signs commemorating Bellingham's new status as a Green Power Community at a special Earth Day ceremony at Depot Market Square in downtown Bellingham at noon Sat., April 21. To join PSE's Green Power program, visit www.pse.com for more information.

The Environmental Learning Center at Maritime Heritage Park

WWU CELEBRATES EARTH DAY

WHAT: Western Washington University's Earth Day celebration, themed "Local Revolutions = Global Solutions," offers a number of workshops and activities at Viking Union and on the lawns around campus as well as musical events. Speakers and performers include:

- Masada Generella: Local environmental and racial justice activist and author defines environmental and social justice issues.
 - Community Car Share Program General Manager Lorraine Wilde describes the Car Share program.
 - A panel of farm workers speak about their experiences working in agriculture and environmental justice and health issues that they face in their work
 - Rainforest Action Network (RAN) activists describe their projects and the forms of creative protest and activism they utilize to fight for the environment.
 - Jason Darling, RE-Store, will discuss the new Sustainable Living Center
 - Music by Yogoman Burning Band, Estrella, The Planets, Slender Means, The Growers (See p.22 for details)
- WHEN:** 12-6pm Sat., April 21
WHERE: WWU campus
COST: Free
INFO: (360) 650-6129 or ea.earth@wwu.edu

ANDREW L. SUBIN
CRIMINAL DEFENSE

DRUG, ALCOHOL & DRIVING RELATED OFFENSES

FREE CONSULTATION

360.734.6677

Step out of Bellingham and into
BIJOU
 where everything has a story

SPRING ALICIOUS

GIFTS GALORE

1417 CORNWALL AVENUE
 DOWNTOWN BELLINGHAM 733-8368

Win a bike!

Bike to Work and School Day
 is Friday,
 May 18th!

EverybodyBike.com
 or call 676-6974 for more fun, events, and prizes.

Bike to Work and School Day
BELLINGHAM, WA.
 WHATCOM COUNTY

Bike to Work and School Day 2007 is presented by SSC